

Sermon for the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

'You are anxious and troubled about many things.'

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Our Lord speaks to Martha, as she waits upon her savior. He speaks, *'Martha, Martha, you are anxious.'* He does not criticize, he only notes a truth. *'You are anxious.'* It is true of Martha, she is indeed anxious, for she is a daughter of Eve, a child of Adam, and thus with all the children of the fall, her life is anxiety.

Who then is not overcome with every kind of anxiety, petty and great? Important or insignificant? Does anyone go through the course of a day not besieged by the troubles and perceived troubles of this life?

You awake. 'I haven't slept enough.' 'I have to get ready.' 'I can't be late to work.' 'Do I have time for coffee?' 'Why aren't the kids up yet?' 'I have to beat the traffic.'

At work, anxiety still dwells upon your shoulder like a serpent whispering into your ear. 'I have to get this report done by close of day.' 'My boss wants me in his office, I hope I haven't done something wrong.' 'Will I make my promotion? I could use the money.' 'Management isn't pleased with my performance, I hope I don't get downsized. My family needs the insurance.'

You return to your house, 'My family is in chaos, am I a failure as a parent?' 'My children are disobedient, am I a failure as a mother, a father?' 'My husband, wife is angry at me, am I failure at marriage?' 'Has life passed me, and left me behind again?'

You go to bed, welcoming the sweet blissful oblivion of sleep; for in the darkness of slumber, troubles can no longer assault you. But be not fooled; anxiety may

haunt also your dreams.

And these are but the problems of a day, not even the problems of a life: 'Did I choose the right school? The right career? The right woman? The right home?' 'Do I have enough to live on? Enough to retire on? Enough to pass on?'

It is not just you who are stricken by this *sickness unto death*, this anxiety that keeps our souls as if balanced on the edge of a precipice, terrified by the freedom we possess, the freedom to choose badly; the freedom to do what is wrong; the freedom that calls from chasm, 'jump'.

Churches, too, have their anxieties. 'Are we taking in enough from the collection plate to keep our doors open?' 'Are we doing enough to bring in the lost?' 'Are we doing enough to educate the youth?' 'Will this congregation even be here in ten years?' 'Is there something more I could be doing to save it?'

These are the worldly fears that haunt the mind of every priest and pastor. But they are that, worldly; even as all life's anxieties are worldly, for the world, as the domain wherein our free-will is expressed, enslaves us to the fear of what we may do with our free will, what we may choose by it; what mode of failure we will grasp to make our own. Freedom is a terror; for most of what is good in life is given of God from above; what is evil is given to each by their own self. One does not choose to be born; one does choose to become a suicide.

Our Lord speaks, '*Mary has chosen the good portion.*' But what Mary has chosen is not to choose at all. She has chosen to receive. She has willed to have no will, and so be filled with the will of Christ.

What the Lord teaches here in the house of Mary and Martha is a repetition of what He taught us in His great sermon: '*Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as one of these, for God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire.*'

It is not that birds and flowers do nothing. They do all that is proper to their natural, simple, vocations as birds and flowers. Flowers sprout and grow and bloom, as is proper; and the Almighty provides all else. Birds fly and flock and nest, as is proper; and the God of Lands provides all else.

So Our Lord beseeches us: *'do not be anxious'*. Merely do what it is yours to do, to keep yourself, and to love your neighbor, those who God has placed near you, and in so doing, fulfill your humanity; and let that be enough, for all else the Father will provide.

The Lord will indeed provide what you need. And He will not merely provide shoes and clothing, house and home, the things necessary to survival. He will provide that which is necessary for glory; for it is not enough that you fulfill your humanity, it is His will that you assume His divinity.

By what means, then, shall you receive from the Father His divine radiance? Christ tells us simply: *'Do not be anxious, for each day is its own evil.'*

Mary listens to the Word of Him who shall suffer; and so she shall be united with His suffering. The apostles shall carry the Word of Him who was crucified, and so shall be transformed by the blood of their own slaying. For if it was proper that God Himself suffer in the flesh and die, only thereafter to receive glory, is it not fitting that those who are reborn of His life, and feast upon His body, become sufferers with Him, that we might share in His immortality?

Behold, Paul lights the way, for he writes: *'Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body.'*

We who have cast out anxiety; who have received from God his Word, must now receive from him the burden of the Word; the affliction of being conformed to His purity; the anguish of being transformed by the fire of His love; the wound of *'shedding the corruptible, and putting on the incorruptible.'*

Therefore, knowing that the day of our glorification is promised, engraved in the very foundations of the earth, let us not look back to the restless disquiet of being enslaved to our own shattered wills.

Rather, receive, embrace, be united to what the Lord has given to you, His divine Word, His eternal promise, His everlasting glory, knowing that for this you *toil, struggling with all his energy that he so powerfully works within you.*

Sing with King David: *‘One thing have I desired of the LORD. That I will seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life.’*

For even as Mary reposes to dwell in the presence of her Lord; so shall you repose, good Christian. You shall repose in a box of wood, shrouded in white, set before an altar, and then into the earth. You shall repose, and receive *the good portion, ‘To behold the beauty of the Lord forevermore.’*

‘And this shall never be taken away from you.’

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon texts: Genesis 18:1-10; Colossians 1:21-29; Luke 10:38-42